



The globalization of sexuality

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tions here hint at possible and interesting answers, they are – perhaps inevitably – circumscribed by the tradition from which the collection emerges.

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DEREK McCORMACK

The globalization of sexuality. By Jon Binnie. London: Sage. 2004. 167 pp. £60 cloth; £19.99 paper. ISBN 0 7619 5935 1 cloth; 0 7619 5936 X paper.

In *The globalization of sexuality*, Jon Binnie cogently demonstrates how the cultural interpenetrates with the economic in processes of ‘queer globalization’, countering both the economic determinism of much globalization research (where the globalization of culture is posited as a consequence of transnational economic flows) and the largely anti-materialist bias of queer theory and gay/lesbian studies (which often marginalize questions of class and economics). He also takes issue with researchers of sexuality, particularly Altman, who overemphasize a political economic basis to queer globalization, and argue that so-called ‘global gay’ culture is a consumption-based by-product of the US domination of international economic linkages. Instead, Binnie explores the *mutual* relationship between (homo)sexual desire and political economy manifested on interconnected local, national and global scales.

Several key themes emerge. Prominent among them is a consistent critique of the class bias implicit in constructions of gay/lesbian/queer (GLQ) identities: the cost of participating in the consumer spaces of commercial ‘gay villages’, or in the events which symbolize ‘global gay’ (e.g. the Gay Games, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras), means that GLQ identity is a middle-to-upper-class identity. This distances working-class queers from a claim to GLQ identity, and has further implications in the context of globalization. Binnie demonstrates that global citizenship, and the associated ability to advance GLQ rights internationally, is reserved for the economically active and powerful. The development of GLQ rights in an international context consequently reflects middle-to-upper-class values, further marginalizing working-class queers. This raises the related issues of authenticity and inclusion/exclusion: who has the right to belong to, and participate in, the ‘queer community’? In a globalized world, authenticity seems to be based on the ability to pay and to adhere to middle-to-upper-class values of moral respectability. Binnie also critiques the ethnocentrism of GLQ studies – not only the US bias in the production of knowledge, but also the emergence of a ‘new racism’ where nation-states’ levels of development are measured by their differing attitude towards homosexuality, permitting some nations to claim a moral high ground in an international context based on the extension of rights to queers. Binnie suggests that in this context the internationalization of GLQ activism may be part of a neocolonial ‘Western’ civilizing mission. A related theme is the invisibility of national identity in questions of queer globalization. Binnie is critical of those who claim that national cultural differences are erased by transnational connectivity and ‘global gay’ consumer culture. Although gay bars may look similar in global cities, cultural differences mean that queers *use* these spaces in different ways. He is thus sensitive

to the agency of nation-states, cities and queer subjects *vis-à-vis* processes of globalization. Queers are not merely passive consumers of 'global gay', but are active producers of local sexual cultures which articulate in different ways with transnational sexual cultures, *both* influencing *and* influenced by 'global gay' consumer culture.

The globalization of sexuality is a timely intervention in current debates around the relationship between sexuality, globalization, national agency, GLQ rights and sexual citizenship, forcefully demonstrating the interpenetration and mutual constitution of (local and global) sexual cultures and transnational economic formations, and thus providing a much-needed counter-argument to the economic reductionism of recent work on queer globalization from a political economy perspective.

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Five billion years of global change: a history of the land. By Denis Wood. New York: Guilford Press. 2004. 336 pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN 157230 958X.

The 'five billion years' of Denis Wood's title is in fact a dramatic understatement. Wood argues that that if we are to understand the current global predicament we need a long run-up. A very long one. In fact, he takes us all the way back to the earliest nanoseconds of the Big Bang, which, as I now know, took place about 11 billion years ago (for those in the Anglo orbit – those are American billions). Then Wood works his way, step by step, aeon by aeon, to our globalized present.

It's not easy to get critical purchase on a work that offers an integrated theory of just about everything. One way we might characterize Wood's book is as a counterpoint to a tendency in recent social thought – both popular and academic – to treat life in a globalized world in a kind of horizontal or flattened-out manner. Although, as far as I am aware, only one author has actually resurrected the term 'flat earth', a great deal of the writing which addresses the processes of 'globalization' and the condition of 'globality' treats the earth as a kind of static, featureless arena on which ever more frenetic social mobilities and interconnectivities play themselves out. Ironically, the uptake of environmental concerns in the humanities—with all its attention to novel forms of trans-border seepage and flow—often compounds this sense of dynamic socio-technical change stirring up the surface of a passive, or merely reactive, planetary body. What Wood impresses upon us is the necessity of understanding the deep formative processes that have made the earth and all its life forms, including *Homo sapiens*, what they are today. His take on the 'global' reaches beyond the many mobilizations associated with what we call 'modernity' into earlier, sometimes much earlier, movements of our species across the planet. And further still into the wanderings and interminglings of other species, the couplings of life and its physical environments, and the dynamic interactions between rock, air and water. What we have come to think